

DPH Seeking Dental Volunteers to Protect Children's Teeth Through Seal-A-Smile Program

Dover – With children still munching their way through all of that Halloween candy and looking forward to holiday treats, that means higher sugar consumption which can impact the health of young teeth and even lead to cavities. Research shows dental sealants which shield the back teeth could prevent up to 80 percent of cavities in school-aged children. Yet according to a CDC report, about 60 percent of school children ages 6-11 years don't get dental sealants.

That's why the Division of Public Health (DPH) is seeking dentists wishing to use their skills to help Delaware's children in the Seal-A-Smile program which brings the dental office to local schools. Too many children still lack access to regular dental care. The program travels all across the state in the Mobile Dental Clinic, visiting elementary schools to provide preventive dental services to children who do not have dental homes.

During the 2015-2016 academic year, the Seal-A-Smile program visited 25 schools statewide and provided oral exams to over 400 children. Seventy-three percent of those children received dental sealants, a thin plastic coating that is applied to molars for cavity protection, and a total of 919 teeth were sealed. However, nearly half of the children who were screened were diagnosed with untreated cavities, and seven percent of the students overall had conditions that required emergency treatment. Many of these children are from lower income families, receive free or reduced lunch and despite the fact that they are Medicaid eligible, do not regularly see a dentist.

CDC research shows that low-income children are 20 percent less likely to have sealants than higher-income children. Additionally, lack of dental care can have a profound impact on children's health, development, and self-esteem.

"Many children with untreated cavities will have difficulty eating, speaking, and learning," said DPH Director Dr. Karyl Rattay. "School-based dental programs are an effective way to get oral health care to children and help children lead a healthy, normal life."

DPH is asking local dentists to contribute 2-3 hours of their time per shift, to assist in its mission to promote oral health and disease prevention among Delaware's children. There is no minimum or maximum limit to the number of times a dentist can volunteer during the school year. With the help of volunteering dentists, DPH seeks to reach more schools across the state to provide these much needed dental services.

Dentists interested in participating in the Seal-A-Smile program can find the program flyer and participation form at <http://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/hsm/files/sealasmilevolunteerflyer.pdf>. Questions can be directed to 302-744-4554.

A person who is deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind or speech-disabled can call the DPH phone number above by using TTY services. Dial 7-1-1 or 800-232-5460 to type your conversation to a relay operator, who reads your conversation to a hearing person at DPH. The relay operator types the hearing person's spoken words back to the TTY user. To learn more about TTY availability in Delaware, visit <http://delawarerelay.com>.

Delaware Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each

day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, and drink almost no sugary beverages.